

KHIRBAT 'ATARUZ 2011-2012: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

CHANG-HO JI
La Sierra University
Riverside, California

ROBERT D. BATES
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Introduction

The ancient ruins of Khirbat 'Ataruz are perched on a ridge overlooking the Dead Sea above the Wadi Zarqa Main on the north, and the Wadi Sayl Haydan on the south. It is located 24 km south of the town of Madaba, 10 km west of the village Libb and 3 km east of the ancient site of Machaerus, in Jordan (**Fig. 1**).¹ This site once stood at a crossroads where the ancient roads coming from the Dead Sea, the Wadi Sayl Haydan and the town of Madaba met. During the summers of 2011-2012, a small team of eight archaeologists, students, and volunteers along with eighteen Jordanian workers from the Beni-Hamida region of Jordan continued excavations² at Khirbat 'Ataruz under the direction of Chang-Ho Ji of La Sierra University (**Fig. 2**). This project was excavated with the cooperation of the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University.³

¹To reach the site one must drive approximately 13 km south from Madaba along the Kings Highway (J35). Turn right at the little town of Libb and continue approximately 12 km toward Machaerus. The site will be on a low hill on the left side of the highway. The small village of Jabal Hamidah is 2 km beyond the site. Latitude: 31° 34' 31"; Longitude: 35° 40' 03".

²The authors would like to thank the volunteers and staff members who participated in the 2011-2012 excavations at Khirbat 'Ataruz. The 2011 team consisted of director/field supervisor Chang-Ho Ji and square supervisors Robert Bates and Bongjae Kim. The 2012 team included director/field supervisor Chang-Ho Ji; field supervisor Robert Bates; square supervisors Christine Chitwood and Abelardo Rivas; artist/photographer Stefanie Elkins-Bates; and GPS surveyor/volunteer Jerry Chase.

³The authors would like to extend special thanks to the sponsoring institutions: La Sierra University and the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University. We would also like to thank the director-general of the Department of Antiquities Dr. Ziad Al-Saad and his staff for their support and the Department of Antiquities field representatives Husam Hjazeen and Basm al-Abadi; Barbara Porter and Chris Tuttle of the Amman Center for Oriental Research; those who have provided financial support for the 2011-2012 excavation including the Versacare Foundation, the Korean Research Foundation, the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University, Jong Keun Lee at Sahm Yook University, Korea, and Leona G. Running, professor emerita at Andrews University.

Historical and Biblical Context

Khirbat 'Ataruz is mentioned in both biblical and historical sources. It has been associated with the ancient city of Ataroth,⁴ and it is mentioned seven times in the Bible. Three references are found in the book of Joshua and describe the town of Ataroth Addar near Bethel and Luz (Josh 16:2, 5; 18:13), while another reference suggests a site along the border of the territory of Ephraim. Neither of these sites fit the location of Khirbat 'Ataruz. However, two passages from the book of Numbers clearly describe a town in Transjordan near Dibon and Jazer in the region of Heshbon, and Nebo. According to Num 34:32, "the children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer." The Bible also mentions that the tribe of Gad was assigned its territory in Transjordan and built several towns there. Since Ataroth is mentioned in relationship to Dibon, Heshbon, and Nebo, it is best identified with the site of Khirbat 'Ataruz (See **Fig. 1**).

Ataroth ('Ataruz) is also mentioned in ancient sources. In the Moabite stele,⁵ Mesha the Debonite, describes how he unified the territory of Moab and "threw off the yoke of Israel." Before the rebellion, however, Mesha was a vassal who paid tribute to the house of Omri. According to 2 Kgs 3:4, "Mesha, king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and he had to deliver to the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams." Mesha and the kingdom of Moab felt oppressed by this relationship which had continued from one generation to the next. As the Moabite stele inscription explains, "Omri had oppressed Moab for many days . . . and when his son replaced him, he said, 'I will continue to oppress Moab.'"⁶ When Mesha rebelled against the house of Omri, probably during the reign of Jehoram, he captured many towns. One of the most strategic locations in the region was the ancient town of Ataroth. According to the Moabite stele, the Gadites had lived in the area around Ataroth from ancient times and Omri, the king of Israel, had built a city and a cult center there.⁷ This fortified town established the southeastern frontier of the kingdom of Israel and sought to control any thoughts of rebellion in the region. The large wall that surrounds the site, the

⁴From the Hebrew word עטרה meaning "prominent place" (lit. "crown"). This may be where Ataroth gets its name due to location overlooking the Dead Sea and two important roads. The word עטרה or עטרוה can also mean a cattle pen, which may reflect the frequent use of the bull in cultic imagery found at the site.

⁵Also known as the Mesha inscription. For a translation and commentary of the Mesha inscription, see Kent P. Jackson. "The Language of the Mesha Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 96-130; and Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008), 387-418.

⁶Mesha Inscription, line 5.

⁷Ibid., lines 10-11.

moat, and glacis protecting the southern approach together with the large cult center helped project the power of the Omride dynasty. In addition, this city may have served to reinforce the kingdom of Israel's relationship with the Gadites.⁸ For Mesha, Ataroth was a constant reminder of the oppression that his people had been suffering.

As the power of the Omride dynasty began to wane, largely as the result of Hazael and the Kingdom of Damascus, Mesha saw an opportunity to "throw off the yoke" of the house of Omri. He sought to unify the region under his leadership by attacking the cities of Nebo and Jahaz. He also launched a campaign against the city of Ataroth and killed its inhabitants as an offering to his god, Chemosh. He destroyed the temple and dragged its sacred object called the "ariel of David"⁹ to the *Qarioth*¹⁰ or city near 'Ataruz where he set it up as a memorial of his victory. Later, he repopulated the city with two unknown groups called the Sharonites and the Maharaites. Excavations at Khirbat 'Ataruz show that not only did Mesha destroy Ataroth and repopulate it, but that its new population continued to reuse part of the temple that had been originally built by Omri.

History of Excavation and Exploration

Early exploration of the region surrounding Khirbat 'Ataruz was carried out by Nelson Glueck. He visited the site in 1937 and found numerous Iron

⁸Not everyone agrees that Ataroth was built to project the power of the Omride dynasty. Ahituv, 404, suggests that Ataroth was not built for Omri, but to benefit the Gadites, noting that "the king did not build Ataroth for 'himself'" rather the king built it for the "men of Gad," based upon his understanding of the syntax of the Mesha Inscription, lines 9-11. However, if the Gadites had lived there since ancient times, maintaining a cult site, why hadn't they already built their own temple and fortifications? Current excavations have not shown any structures that predate the Omride dynasty.

⁹The discussion regarding the meaning of *אֲרִיֵּל דָּוִד* in line 12 of the Moabit stele has not been settled. As Kent Jackson points out, "after 100 years of study directed at the Mesha Inscription, it is safe to say that an exact understanding of these words is still a mystery" ("The Language of the Mesha Inscription, in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. Andrew Dearman [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 96-13-132). For further discussion, see A.F.L. Beeston, "Mesha and Ataroth," *JRAS* 2 (1985): 143-148; J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971); and Ahituv, 405-407.

¹⁰The precise location of the *Qarioth* mentioned in line 13 of the Mesha Inscription is uncertain. The phrase *בְּקָרְיָה* literally means "in the city" and refers to a town south of Ataroth, possibly Mesha's capital of Dibon. However, some scholars suggest that it may refer to either Qureiyat 'Aliyan, 9 km northeast of Dibon, or al-Qureiyi, 5 km south of Ataroth (Ahituv, 401; Dearman, 178; Burton MacDonald, *East of the Jordan: Territories and Sites of the Hebrew Scriptures* [Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000], 174-175, 122-123).

Age I-II sherds as well as sherds from later periods ranging from the Late Hellenistic through the Middle Islamic period.¹¹ Later, a survey conducted by Willy Schottroff found that there were many Iron Age settlements sites in the Jabal Hamidah region.¹² When Herman M. Nieman visited Khirbet 'Ataruz as a student he found similar Iron Age pottery and a figurine fragment. He claimed that the figurine dated from the ninth-eleventh centuries B.C.E. and that it had many Egyptian characteristics including the shape of the body, the fingers and hands, and its general form.¹³

In 1998, Chang-Ho Ji and Lawrence T. Geraty surveyed Khirbat 'Ataruz as part of the Dhiban Plateau Survey Project. Much of the western and southwestern portions of the site are dedicated to a modern cemetery for the local village of Jabal Hamida (**Fig. 3**). On the eastern side, several wall lines were visible on the surface and a few ruins could be seen above ground. Natural limestone caves were found along northeastern escarpment with some caves that may have been hallowed out in ancient times. An ancient dry moat was discovered on the south side where the terrain levels out toward the ridge. As noted by Schottroff and Nieman, many Iron Age-, Hellenistic-, Roman-, and Islamic-period sherds were found on the surface of the site.

The first six seasons (2000-2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010) of excavation at Khirbat 'Ataruz¹⁴ has exposed many architectural and material remains. In 2000, excavations were begun in the area of the acropolis near the eastern edge of the modern cemetery. Two squares were opened and an Iron Age temple with many cultic vessels was found. Among the discoveries were fragments of two possible model shrines, sea shells, a pedestal bowl, a lamp, and a bronze piece with Egyptianized uraeas and cobras. Subsequent excavations revealed a 4.1 x 11 m temple oriented toward the rising sun with doorways that opened into adjacent rooms and a main doorway that opened into the central courtyard (**Fig. 3**). The southern room contained a hearth and a platform/altar and the north room with three entrances may have served as a storage area. Additional buildings on the northern side contained a two raised bedlike platforms and stairs to another possible altar. The eastern side doorway of the main temple building opens directly onto a large courtyard where there are several altars and another building. Four altars face an enclosure wall on

¹¹Nelson Glueck, *Exploration in Eastern Palestine, III* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1939), 135.

¹²Willy Schottroff, "Horonaim, Nimrim, Luhith und der Westrand des Landes Ataroth: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Topographie des Landes Moab," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 101 (1985): 163-225.

¹³Herman M. Niemann, "Einen Statuettentorso von der Hirbet Atarus," *ZDPV* 101 (1985): 171-177.

¹⁴See Chang-Ho Ji, "Khirbat 'Ataruz: An Interim Overview of the 10 Years of Archaeological Architectural Findings," *ADAJ* 55 (2011): 561-579.

the east and a large altar on the north side has a step. Abutting the eastern wall of the temple next to the doorway is a four-tiered stepped structure whose purpose remains unknown.

History of Occupation and Abandonment

The archaeological remains associated with the temple show at least three phases of cultic activity at Khirbat 'Ataruz took place in the early Iron IIA-early Iron IIB periods, roughly dated to the late tenth-early eighth centuries B.C.E.¹⁵ At that time, the site was a major cultic center that was probably built and maintained by a national or at least regional political entity. The temple complex was well laid out, centrally located and built at the highest point of the site. In the Main Sanctuary next to the offering table, a standing stone represented the principle deity. Further excavations suggest that a bull motif was also used to symbolize this god. The cultic objects found near the altar and in other parts of the temple complex reflect the same types of cultic material found at Tell Megiddo and Tell Dan west of the Jordan River (**Fig. 4**).

During the Iron IIB-IIC periods, Khirbat 'Ataruz was rebuilt and reused. Kitchen remains, storage facilities, and water channels suggest that the area was primarily adapted for domestic purposes. However, the eastern side of the earlier Iron IIA courtyard and its nearby building remains were continued to be used for cultic purposes. By the end of the Iron IIC period, the site had been abandoned. Currently, there is no evidence of either domestic or cultic activity taking place until the early Hellenistic period when it was rebuilt.

The Hellenistic occupants of the tell reused the earlier Iron II structures and added two long walls inside the Hearth and Double Platform Rooms (**Fig. 4**). Also several walls and rooms in the southwestern part of Field A were built during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods (ca. 200 B.C.E.-100 C.E.). In addition, excavations in Field C along the north side of Khirbat 'Ataruz revealed late Hellenistic-early Roman structures including a bath installation with plastered steps and walls. The abundance of storage jar sherds suggests that the Hellenistic and early Roman settlements took advantage of an agriculturally rich region. At that time, Khirbat 'Ataruz was most likely engaged in cereal farming, as well as oil or wine production. However, by the end of the first century C.E., a decline in agricultural prosperity, together with increased political turmoil in the region, contributed to the site's abandonment.

¹⁵There is much debate as to the chronology of the Iron II period in the southern Levant, which is beyond the immediate scope of the present paper. In this report, we tentatively date Iron IIA to the late tenth-late ninth centuries B.C.E. (ca. 950-830 B.C.E.), Iron IIB to the late tenth-late eighth centuries B.C.E. (ca. 830-700 B.C.E.), and Iron IIC to the seventh century B.C.E. (ca. 700-600 B.C.E.).

Khirbat 'Ataruz remained unoccupied for nearly 800 years before it was resettled in the Middle Islamic period (ca. 1000-1400 C.E.). Residents reestablished 'Ataruz as a medium-sized village, but the exact size and plan of the settlement is difficult to determine. Although there are a number of walls associated with this period, many of the domestic rooms and buildings reused earlier walls rather than erecting new ones. Indeed, much of the building stone used in the construction of the early-mid Iron IIA temple complex was dismantled during the Middle Islamic period. This practice was particularly extensive in the area to the north of the acropolis. Nevertheless, 'Ataruz was a populous and thriving village during the Middle Islamic period.

Project Goals 2011-2012

Although the excavation team was small, the project had many goals planned for the 2011-2012 season. First, the project continued to examine the temple complex that was discovered in previous seasons and explored its western (Field A) and southern (Field E) boundaries (**Fig. 3**). On the western side of the large courtyard, previous excavation had revealed the outline of several buildings. Initial excavation found a large grinding stone and Iron Age II pottery in a small room. The goal of the 2011 season was to continue excavation in the small room in order to find the western edge of the temple complex and determine the size and function of the small room. In addition, the 2010 season uncovered another altar with an offering step on the eastern side of the temple complex. At the base of the step were several cultic objects including a pillar with an inscription. The goal for the 2011 season was to determine the exact context of these cultic objects as well as the size and function of the step altar or platform (**Fig. 5**).

During the Islamic period, some buildings were added to the northern side of temple complex. A second goal of the 2011-2012 seasons was to explore the northern extent of the temple complex. Questions remained as to whether this marked the end of the temple complex or whether these buildings were reused and modified in later periods. Several additional wall outlines were visible on the surface near northern edge of the tell before it begins to slope down in a series of terraces. To address these issues, a new field (Field F; **Fig. 6**) was opened under the direction of Robert Bates (See **Fig. 2**).

On the southwest side of the temple complex a cistern was found in an auxiliary courtyard (Western Courtyard) in Field A (**Fig. 4**). A third goal of the 2011-2012 seasons was to explore this cistern. Although the local population had been using this water source in recent years, it had not been examined by archaeologists. Debris from the surface had been pushed into the opening and collected on the floor. Some of the stones were part of the original building material used in the temple complex. Very little water was visible from the opening. The purpose of this excavation was to determine

the size and approximate age of the construction of the cistern and evaluate whether debris from the surface that had fallen into the cistern had any archaeological significance.

A fourth goal of the 2011-2012 seasons was to create an accurate map of the temple complex and determine the spatial relationship of the many outlying walls of the acropolis. Khirbat 'Ataruz is a large site where most of the excavation has focused on the acropolis. The extent of the outer limits of the site had not been fully reported. Creating an accurate map using the Promark 3 GPS unit would provide a framework for exploring the relationship of the emerging buildings to the temple complex and allow for the creation of additional fields.

Field E: The Eastern Edge of the Temple Complex

On the eastern side of the temple complex, a low platform was discovered in 2010 with small altar (0.70 x 0.70 m) on the top. At the base of the platform, a stone step was found with two small stone columns on either side. The first column contained an inscription on one side that dated to the late ninth-early eighth centuries B.C.E. The second stone column had a square-shaped top incorporated into the column with a shallow depression that might have been used to burn incense or to hold torch-fire inside. The purpose of the 2011 excavation was to determine the relationship of this platform and step with the nearby walls (see **Fig. 5**).

In 2011, three 6 x 6 m squares were opened to explore the eastern extent of the temple complex (Field E) and parts of the temple compound. Excavations revealed an Iron IIA-IIB courtyard (Inscription Column Courtyard) and a raised rectangular platform that was built for cultic activities. On the south side, a three-step staircase was discovered that connected this courtyard with the Central Courtyard near the Main Sanctuary. This staircase was the entrance for the courtyard when the platform altar was first built. Priests from the Iron IIA period probably approached the platform from the Central Courtyard facing the rising sun. Later, in Iron IIB, this entrance was blocked off in order to put a square fireplace or furnace in the corner. In addition, most of the staircase was covered with soil, and the covered section was incorporated into the earth-beaten floor. On the floor of the courtyard, three large irregularly shaped flat stones were found near the western wall directly in front of the platform and were probably used as offering tables. The floor, fireplace, and offering stones were all contemporary with the stone columns found in 2010. By the late ninth century B.C.E., the area was transformed into a partially enclosed courtyard surrounded on three sides by the platform and two walls and was probably entered only through a narrow alley from the southeast (**Figs. 5 and 6**). The Inscription Column

Courtyard was originally built in the Iron IIA period and reused later in the late Hellenistic period.

The 2012 season centered on the architectural details located on the north and south sides of the platform. Questions still remained regarding the broader architectural context of the Inscription Column Courtyard and its overall plan at the beginning of this season. While excavating Square E3, four walls of a rectangular room (Niche Room; 3 x 6 m) were discovered on the north side of the Inscription Column Courtyard (see **Fig. 5**). At the center of the room was an arched niche built into the western wall approximately .45 x .60 m with a depth of .20 m.

A second adjacent room was found in Square A14 and the northwestern corner of Square E3 (see **Fig. 7**). This room was divided in two by a compartment wall which was connected with a door (1 m wide). Excavation showed that this room, like the Niche Room, was originally built in the Iron IIA period and then later reused in the late Hellenistic period; a small lamp was found in this room (**Fig. 8**). In this area, four earth-beaten floors dating to the Iron IIA-IIB periods were also found. The earliest floor was made during the mid-Iron IIA period when the Main Sanctuary and its Central Courtyard were at its peak usage. The inscription column stood next to the platform altar. The wall associated with this Iron IIA floor was built in two courses with chink stones. Its stones were medium-sized, relatively well dressed, and laid with much care. A later floor was added in the early Iron IIB period, where an iron javelin (**Fig. 9**) and complete cooking pot (**Figs. 10 and 11**) were found *in situ*. During this later phase, a different construction technique seems to have been adopted. The walls consisted of only one row of large-sized boulders. These two early walls were reused in the mid and late Iron IIB periods; the building's residents also laid two earth-beaten floors above the earlier ones. During the 2007 season, the project identified a late Hellenistic floor in the area that was similar to the late Hellenistic earth-beaten floor found in the rooms in Square A21.

On the south side of the Inscription Column Courtyard Square, E2 was also opened in 2011. The purpose of this square was to determine the eastern extent of the temple complex and the southern extent of the courtyard. In addition, a small room with a large grinding stone adjacent to Square E2 had been excavated in 2007. Three walls were found made of chink and boulder construction. In the northwest corner, the southern edge of the Inscription Column Courtyard was found that turned toward the north to form the backside of the altar platform. A second wall and doorway running in a north-south direction connected with the southern edge courtyard and altar platform. Several Iron IIA broken vessels were found including a cup/jar (**Fig. 12**) and juglet (**Fig. 13**) near the doorway. Two large stones lay on the floor next to the doorway, but were not excavated. A third wall on the northeast corner of the square may connect to a wall in Square E3.

Field F: The Northern Edge of the Temple Complex 2012

The 2012 season at Khirbat 'Ataruz included the opening of a new field (Field F) on the north side of the temple complex where the acropolis ends and the hill begins to slope downward in a series of possible terraces (**Fig. 14**). In this area, the tops of several walls were visible above the surface and its close proximity to the north side of the temple area suggested that these structures might mark the northern extent of the temple complex. Like many of the other buildings on the acropolis, it was thought that these buildings might be associated with some type of cultic practice. Alternatively, these buildings could be related to domestic dwellings, industries, or defensive structures. Therefore, the main purpose of Field F was to examine the edge of the temple acropolis and determine its northern extent as well as to look for a possible entrance that may have led into the complex. In addition, since there are several walls in the area that could represent fortifications or possibly other outlying domestic buildings, a secondary purpose for this field was to examine these buildings and their relationship to the temple acropolis.

Four squares (F1-4) were opened in Field F: three at the edge of the terrace (F1-3), one (F4) straddling the edge, and the northern downslope (**Fig. 3**). The initial probes in F1-2 did not reveal any architecture and consisted of topsoil and stone rubble. These squares were closed and will be reopened at a later time. However, Squares F3-4 revealed visible wall lines running from north to south that were transected by an east-west wall line.

Excavation in Square F3 revealed two north/west walls and three east/west walls (**Fig. 14**). A central wall (Wall 5) continues north/south into Square F4 as Wall 12, dividing the square into two rooms (Rooms A and B). On the east side, Room A, approximately 2 x 4 m, consists of four walls from both squares (Walls 5-7, 10, and 12). However, Wall 6 does not extend the full length of the room and may represent a doorway on the eastern side. Iron IIB pottery was found near the walls and the floor associated with the walls. The north wall of Room A was found in F4 (Wall 10) and six courses were exposed on its north side.

The dimensions of Room B are uncertain as the western portion of the room may lie in another square. Room B probably measures 2 x 4 m and consists of three complete walls and one partial wall (Walls 5, 10, 11, 22, and 28). It also appears that Wall 28 on the western side does not extend southward for the full length of the room, but it seems to be the same length as Wall 6 in Room A (**Fig. 14**). This may indicate an entrance to the room. Although the south wall of Room A bonds to the central wall (Wall 5), the south wall of Room B does not. Instead, it abuts the central wall and may belong to a later building phase. Finally, the length of Room B is shorter than Room A because an additional wall (Wall 20) was added to form the northern wall of an enclosure (**Figs. 14 and 15**).

The most interesting discovery was found in Room B (**Fig. 16**). Wall 22 was found abutting Wall 5 and parallel to Wall 20. This construction formed a very small room, roughly 1 m wide, which extended into the western balk. Pottery found sealed against this enclosure included a small lamp, suggesting that it was made sometime during the mid eighth century B.C.E (**Fig. 17**). An area next to Wall 5 was outlined with small stones to form a stone-lined pit in which a large Iron II collard-rim storage jar (**Fig. 18**) was placed. The bottom of the jar was buried into the ground and soil was backfilled to keep the jar upright. Additional stones were added around the jar to a height of approximately 0.5 m. Soil and stones were backfilled to a level just below the jar handles. When the jar was initially discovered, the portion of the jar above the handles was missing.

The bottom of the jar was filled with approximately 10 cm of compacted soil. On top of this soil, the upper shoulders of the jar and 1/3 of the rim were found surrounding a stone (**Fig. 19**). Soil was filled into the space and a flat stone was placed horizontally, directly above the sherds, creating a separate space below. Additional stones were stacked vertically on top of edges of the horizontal stone, creating a lining for the jar, with two courses of stones on the western side and one large stone on the southern side (**Fig. 20**). The remaining 2/3 of the rim and other body sherds were found in the fill dirt. The sherds were not resting directly on the stones. Another stone was placed horizontally above this area, creating another separate space below it. This top stone was covered with soil up to the edges of the broken jar. Everything was sealed and undisturbed when the jar was discovered and there were no seeds, objects, or additional sherds unrelated to the jar itself found within it.

Finally, in Square F4 another wall (Wall 14) running north to south, was found abutting Wall 10 (see **Fig. 14**). Three courses were excavated and a possible compacted earthen-floor was found sealing against this wall (**Fig. 20**). It is uncertain whether this wall belongs to the same field phase as Rooms A and B. It may represent an earlier building phase or possibly a lower terrace of buildings sharing a common wall. Further excavation in adjacent squares should reveal the nature of this wall.

Although it is too early to determine the phasing and the function of the rooms that have been recently discovered in Field F, it appears that the jar installation was created some time during Iron Age IIB. The low collar on the jar and the lamp that were found lying against it suggest that the room was occupied between the mid- to the late-eighth century B.C.E. (see **Figs. 17 and 18**). These rooms were probably used for domestic purposes, either for storage or possibly food preparation. However, since Rooms A and B do not share a common doorway and could not be accessed on the main floor, they must represent separate buildings (see **Figs. 14 and 15**). The entrances to each room must be found in adjacent squares and these two rooms may have had entirely different functions. Further excavation to the east and west

should help clarify the purpose of these two buildings. In future seasons, we plan to continue excavating to the floors in Square F3, expand Square F4 to its north balk, reopen Square F2 and possibly open squares west of Square F3-4 and north of Square F2.

Cistern

On the south side of the temple complex near the Western Courtyard, a cistern was dug in antiquity (see **Fig. 4**). According to the residents of the area, the cistern has been used for generations. The local tribe watered its flocks from the cistern and used the water for cooking. Until recent years, the Jordanian workers at the site would drop a pail down into the cistern to fetch water for tea until they found a snake in the bucket. One of the workers described how his father had plastered the walls sometime in the late 1950s so that it could hold more water. They also said that, in recent years, there has been less water in the cistern; it usually fills up in winter and remains relatively full throughout the summer. Subsequently, the cistern has been sealed in order to allow further study and prevent any accidents.

Exploration of the cistern during the 2011-2012 seasons revealed that the opening of the cistern is roughly square in shape, approximately 1 m wide with a shaft that descends approximately 3.5 m into an oval-shape cistern chamber (**Fig. 22**). The chamber measures approximately 5 x 6 m with a ceiling height of approximately 3.5 m.¹⁶ The walls of the chamber are covered with a recent layer of cement plaster over ancient plaster confirming the local story. The floor of the chamber is covered with debris that forms a mound just below the entrance. Among the debris was a large stone approximately 0.4 x 0.4 x 1.2 m that was hollowed out on one side to a depth of 10 cm in a convex shape. The stone resembles a feeding trough, but it was too dangerous to examine it closely or to remove it from the cistern for further study. The cistern chamber was filled with approximately 0.2-.03 m of water, of which the origin is currently unknown. Evidence from the walls would suggest that the cistern has held as much as 1.5-2.5 m of water during the winter months.

The most remarkable discovery was made in the entrance shaft of the cistern at the end of the 2011 season. Approximately 3 m down from the opening and just above the point where the cistern chamber opens up, a bull figure was found on the wall of the shaft (**Fig. 23**). The bull figure measures approximately 0.5 x 0.6 m with a brownish patina covering the wall (**Fig. 24**). A circular-shaped depression approximately 10-15 cm in diameter rests between the horns on the top of the head and another similar depression is below the right ear. A third one may be below the left ear as well. Each depression seems to be part of the natural stone, but further study is needed

¹⁶Since a detailed documentation of this cistern and its installations are planned for a separate future article, only a brief presentation of the cistern is provided here.

to evaluate whether tools were used to carve their shapes. The circular shape above the horns resembles a solar disk found in Egyptian drawings of an Apis bull or even the goddess Hathor. The shape of the face is nearly identical to those on the bull storage jar from the Main Sanctuary Room.¹⁷ It is also reminiscent of the bull figurine that was found in the Central Courtyard in the 2010 season (see **Fig. 4**).¹⁸ In addition, while we were staring up at the bull we noticed that sunlight from the opening at the top of the cistern shone directly on to the face of the bull at 12:00 pm on 23 June 2011 coinciding with the summer solstice. Within minutes the light was gone. Although the cistern may have been used for centuries, based on the patina and the similarities between the cistern bull and other bull figurines found at the site, it appears that the early inhabitants of Khirbet 'Ataruz used the natural rock and possibly plaster to form an image of a bull on the side of the cistern wall for cultic purposes. Further study is needed to evaluate its iconography and patina.

During the 2012 season, workmen began to clear away some of the larger stones on the cistern floor (**Fig. 25**). The goal is to remove the debris and excavate the inside of the cistern in hopes of finding the bottom and possibly its water source. Some progress was made, but it will likely take several seasons to clear out the remaining debris. In addition, precise measurements were taken and an artist brought in to create a finished drawing of the bull figure which will appear in a future publication (**Fig. 26**).

GPS Mapping

Most of the excavation squares at Khirbat 'Ataruz were created from a central point using "dead reckoning" and a compass. Many excavations have found that using this method can cause "grid drift." As squares are added, the farther the new squares are away from the original point of origin the greater the chance that the new squares will begin to drift away from the central line of reckoning where the squares started. Even small errors as little as 5-10 cm can, over a distance of 100 m, misalign future squares by as much as 10 degrees. In addition, sometimes these errors are drawn into the grid or topographical map and in subsequent seasons the errors are repeated until they become published. These mistakes make it difficult to create 3D renderings, architectural models, and topographical maps that include known architecture. In order to prevent this problem, squares for the 2008 season at Khirbat 'Ataruz were laid out using a Promark 3 GPS base station and rover

¹⁷Chang-Ho Ji, "The Early Iron Age II Temple at Hirbet 'Atarus and Its Architecture and Selected Cultic Objects, in *Temple Building and Temple Cult: Architecture and Cultic Paraphernalia of Temples in the Levant (2.-i. Mill. B.C.E.)* ed. Jens Kamlah (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 203-221 and Tafel 44b-45.

¹⁸Ibid, Tafel 46.

along the Palestinian grid with the help of Matthew Vincent. That season additional squares were added on the south side of the temple complex.

In 2012, the Promark 3 GPS base station and rover were employed to accurately map out the walls of the temple complex and other walls on the site. The base station was set up on the edge of the modern cemetery and elevation/position points were taken along the tops of the walls. The Promark 3 recorded each individual point and a topographical map was generated of the main excavation area including the elevation of each point (**Fig. 27**). This GPS map was used as an overlay to create a new architectural drawing of the temple complex with preexisting drawings of the site (see **Fig. 4**). As predicted, some grid drift had taken place on the eastern edge of the complex; however, this slight deviation was corrected and the new drawings reflect the most accurate representation of the temple complex of the Iron Age. In addition, a walking survey was done along the tops of walls outside of the excavation area. GPS points were measured and photos were taken of prominent walls along the perimeter of the site (**Figs. 28 and 29**). Finally, a basic 3D model was created using the GPS points and the new architectural drawings. Using Google Sketchup, the walls of the site were added to a Google Earth map of the area to give an aerial view of the temple complex within its geographic context.

Female Figurine

While taking measurements and shooting photographs of the walls along the perimeter, Stefanie Elkins found a small broken female figurine fragment (Object no. ATZ 12-014). The figurine measures 4 x 5.5 cm and features a female torso (**Fig. 30**). The head is missing and the lower half is broken off just below the abdomen but the arms, hands, belly, and a partial breast are clearly visible. There is no evidence of any clothing (i.e., *Naked Goddess* figurine) and the abdomen appears to be distended showing a prominent girth that may represent a sign of fertility and/or pregnancy.¹⁹ The arms are bent and the hands appear to be clutching a flat disk to her chest, which may be a loaf of bread or possibly a musical instrument.²⁰ At least three fingers are visible and there may be striations along the arms, possibly outlining some type of jewelry. The back is slightly convex with no distinguishing features like many

¹⁹Theodore J. Lewis. "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Neal H. Walls (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 85-86.

²⁰For a discussion on female terracotta plaque figurines clutching flat bread or a musical instrument, see Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1998), 164-167; and David T. Sugimoto, *Female Figurines with a Disk from the Southern Levant and the Formation of Monotheism* (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2008), 67-87.

mold-made figurines. The manufacture is typical of Iron Age IIB figurines with a buff or slightly reddish-colored exterior and a gray core. The top shows signs of weathering and the greenish color on the edges suggest that the object has been exposed long enough for some type of vegetation to cause a slight discoloration. The bottom was also broken off, but it does not show the same signs of weathering found on the top. Since the figurine was found near the modern cemetery it may have been exposed during a recent burial.

Similar figurines are found throughout Transjordan including one from Tall Hisban.²¹ In particular, the 'Ataruz figurine bears a striking resemblance to one that was found at Tall Jalul.²² Both female figurines have bent arms clutching the chest and a distended abdomen. Although there are some differences, these similarities suggest that the lower half of the 'Ataruz female figurine may have had shaft style legs and no prominent feet. Moreover, this figurine appears to be holding a round flat disk. Finally, the Jalul figurine and others like it are generally found in a domestic context. The discovery of the 'Ataruz female figurine suggests that a domestic cult involving female figures was present at Khirbet 'Ataruz in addition to the cultic activities taking place in the main temple complex. Indeed, this discovery may point to where some Iron Age domestic buildings might be found. The present female terracotta-molded figurine is significant because it is the only female figurine that has been found to date in the Khirbat 'Ataruz excavations. All other figures found in and around the temple complex have been male including the model shrine figures and other small figurines. Even the animals appear to be male including the various bull figures and the lion figure.²³

Conclusions and Future Excavation Goals

The excavations at Khirbet 'Ataruz continue to expose Iron Age remains from the ancient city of Ataroth mentioned in the Bible and the Mesha Inscription. The 2011-2012 excavations in Fields E and F along the northern and eastern outskirts of the 'Ataruz temple compound have found important buildings and cultic installations. In particular, the findings from Fields A and E established a date for the inscription column, its relationship to the altar, and the nature and chronology of the Inscription Column Courtyard. Ceramics from this courtyard and its associated platform point to the Iron IIA period for their construction and continuous use into the Iron IIB period. The

²¹Object 2826; see Paul J. Ray Jr., *Hesban 6: Tell Hesban and Vicinity in the Iron Age* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2001), 108, Pl. 5.9.

²²Object J0784; see Constance E. Gane, Randall W. Younker, and Paul Ray Jr., "Madaba Plains Project: Tall Jalul 2009," *AUSS* 48 (2010): 165-223, see esp. 189 and Pl. 6.

²³Chang-Ho Ji, "The Early Iron Age II Temple at Hirbet 'Atarus," 211-212 and Tafel 46.

rooms on the north side of the Inscription Column Courtyard also appear to have originated in the Iron IIA-IIB periods, but they were later used during the Hellenistic period. In addition, the buildings in Field F confirm that the temple complex continued to be expanded during the Iron IIB period, even though the purposes of these buildings require further excavation.

Future excavation will include continued exploration of the extent of the temple complex in Fields A, E, and F, a thorough examination of the cistern, and an evaluation of the southern fortifications.

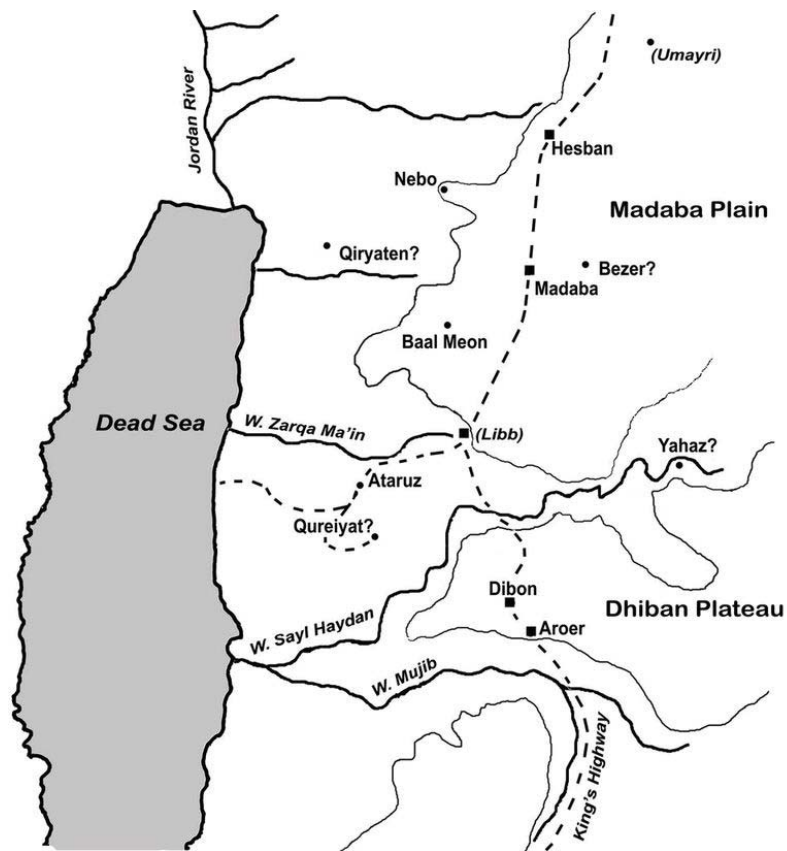


Figure 1. Map of the region surrounding Khribet 'Ataruz showing towns mentioned in the Mesha Inscription.



Figure 2. Coauthors Chang-Ho Ji of La Sierra University and Robert Bates of the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University discuss excavation.

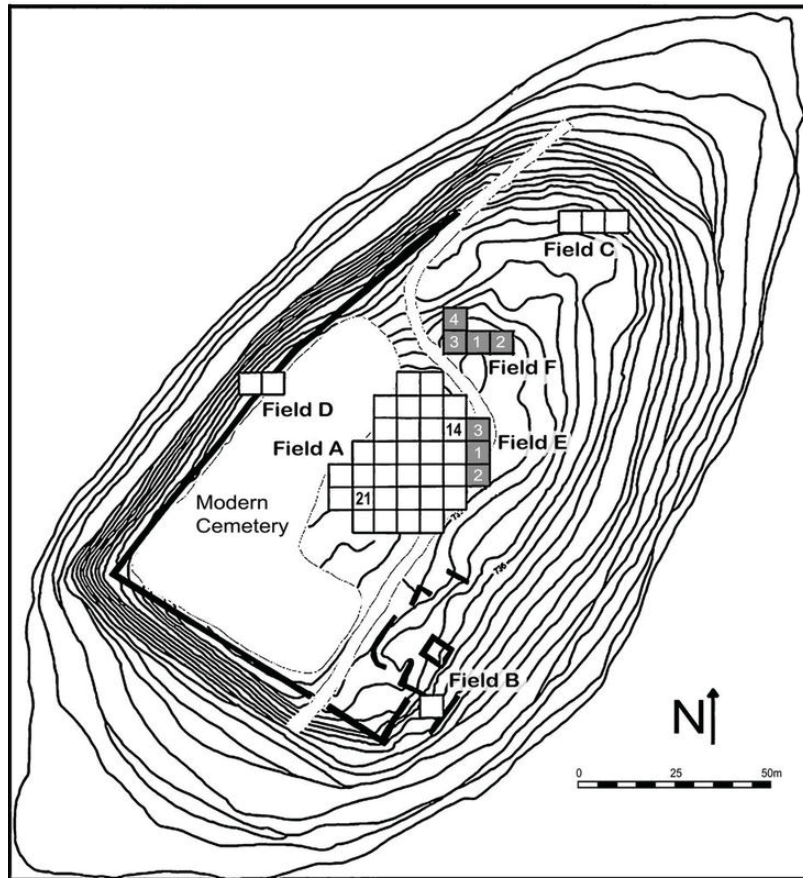


Figure 3. Topographical map of Khirbet 'Ataruz showing the excavated squares and Fields E and F.

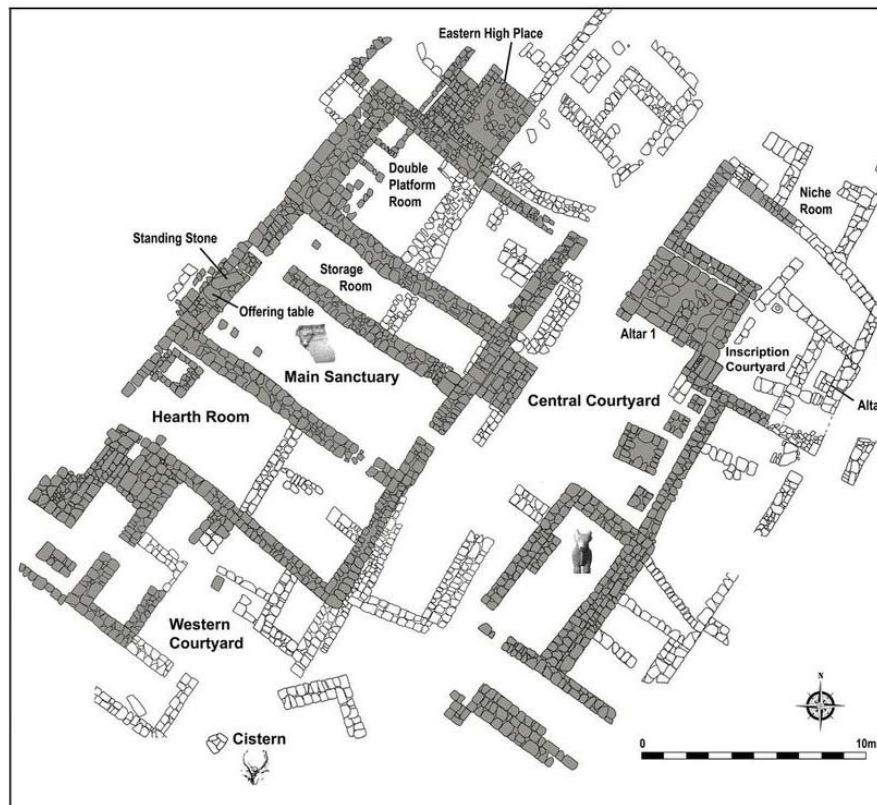


Figure 4. Temple complex map with artifacts showing a bull motif and their relative locations.

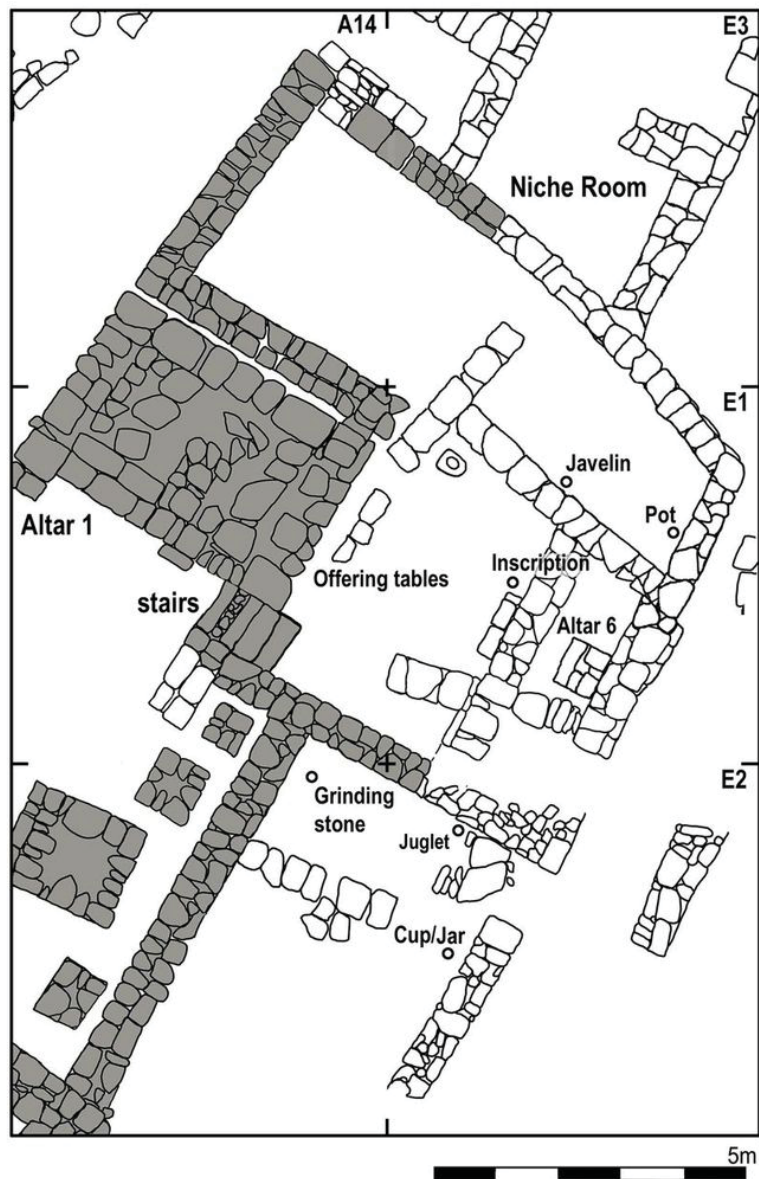


Figure 5. Field E diagram on the eastern side of the temple complex.



Figure 6. Bongjae Kim investigates and excavates the alley to the south of the cultic platform in Square E1.



Figure 7. Facing east, Squares E3 and A14.



Figure 8. Hellenistic lamp with scrolled design found in A14.



Figure 9. *In situ* cooking pot found in A14.

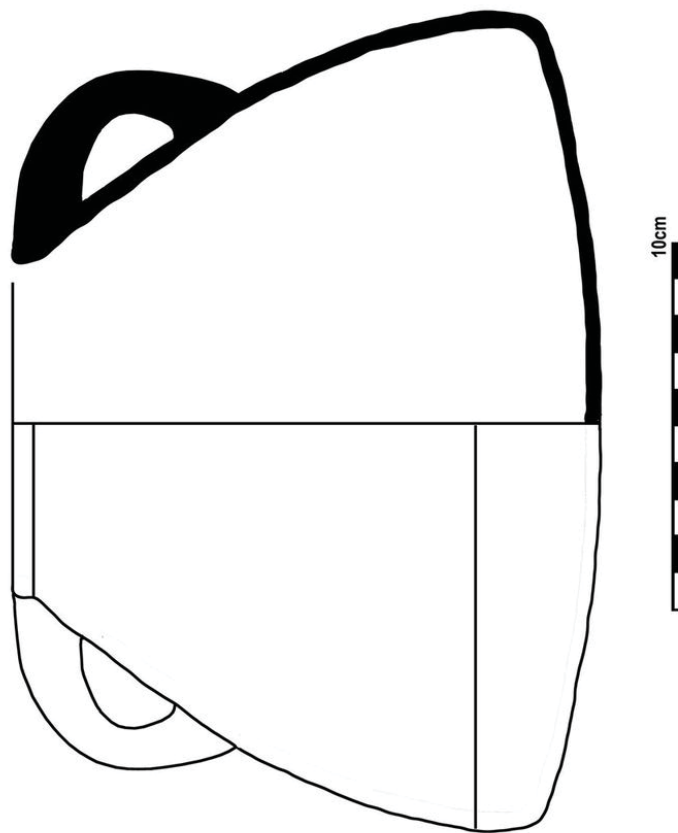


Figure 10. A14 cooking pot diagram.

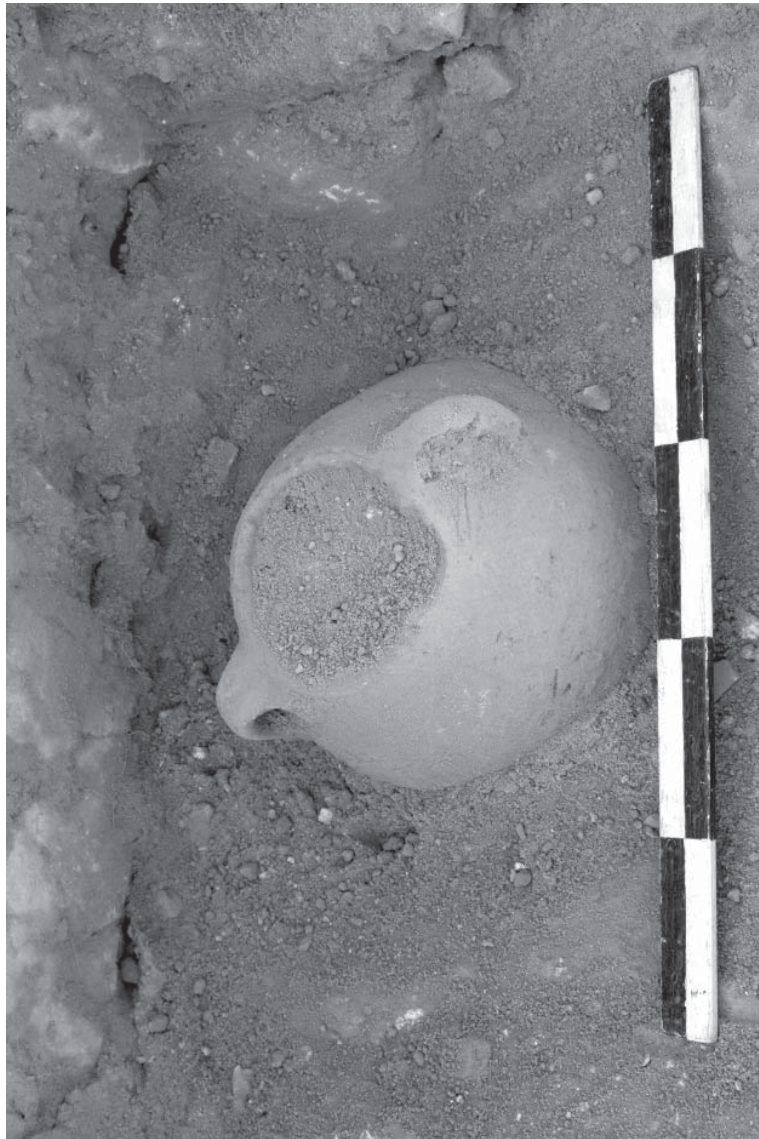


Figure 11. *In situ* cooking pot found in A14.

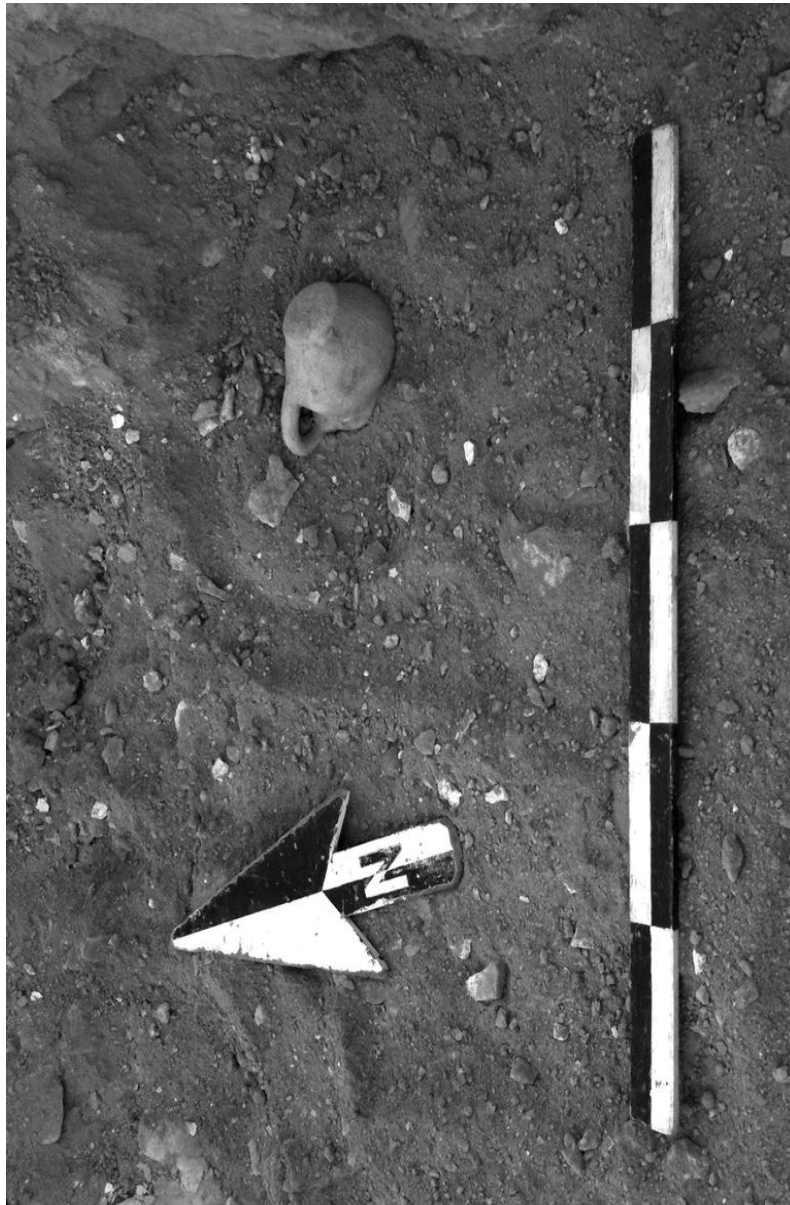


Figure 12. Cup found *in situ* near doorway in E2.



Figure 13. Broken juglet found in E2 near doorway.

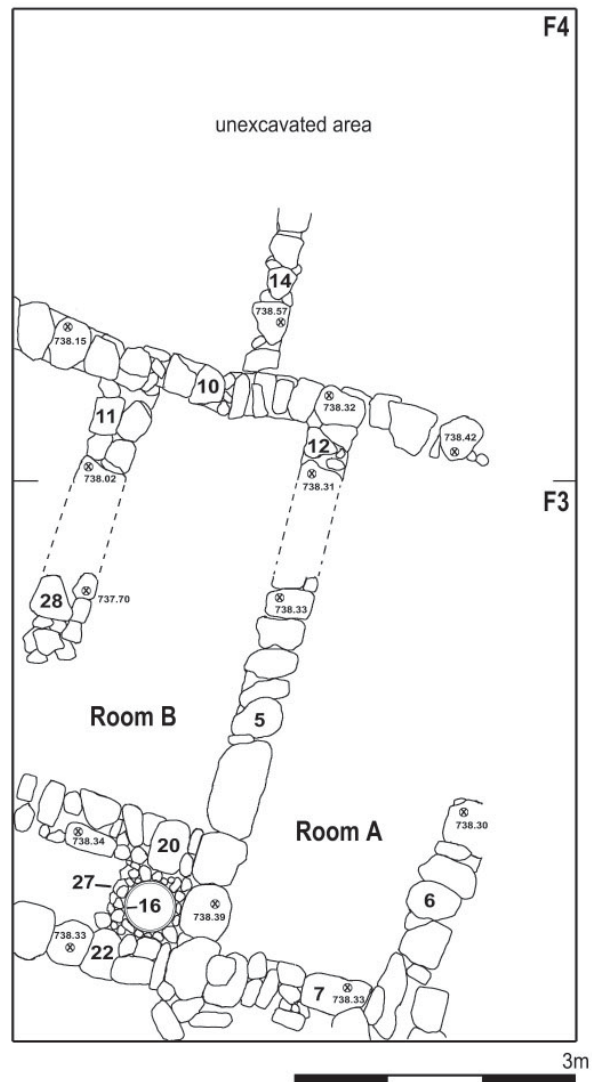


Figure 14. Field F diagram on the northern side of the temple complex.

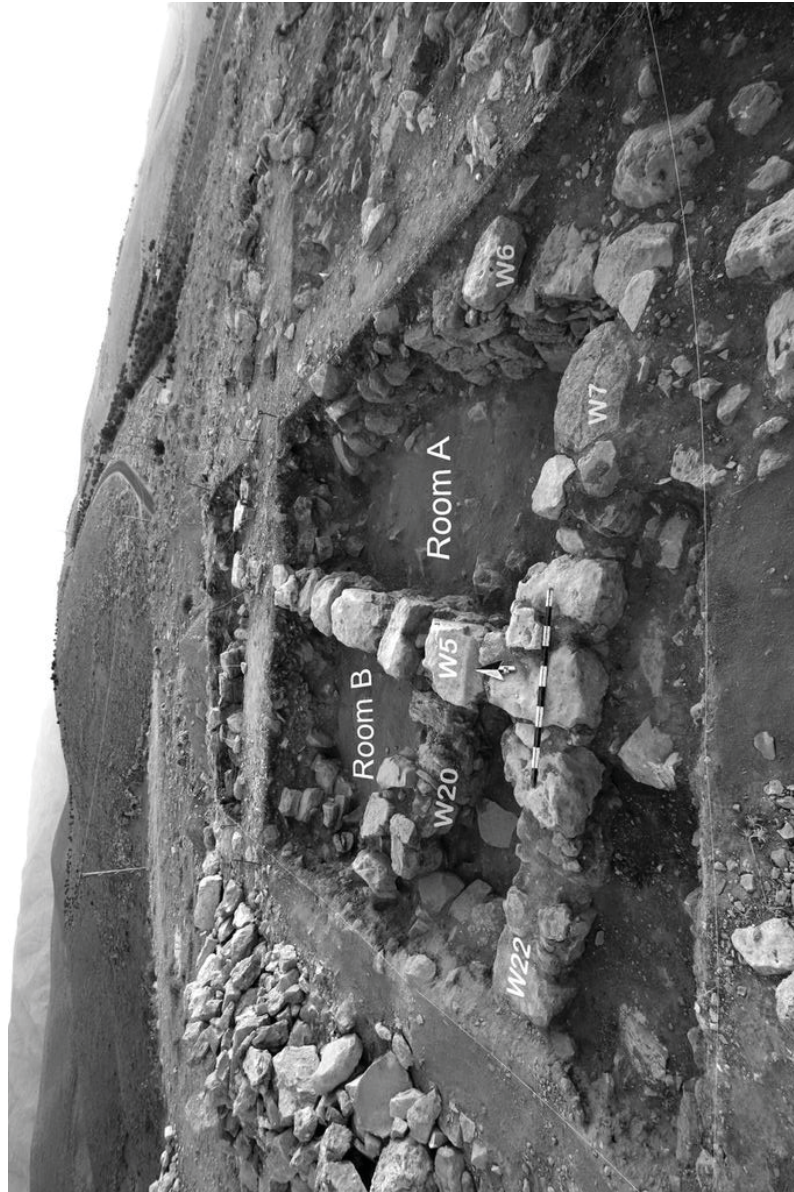


Figure 15. Facing north. Final photo of Square F3 showing Rooms A and B.



Figure 16. Christine Chitwood discovers a nearly complete Iron IIB storage jar in Square F3.

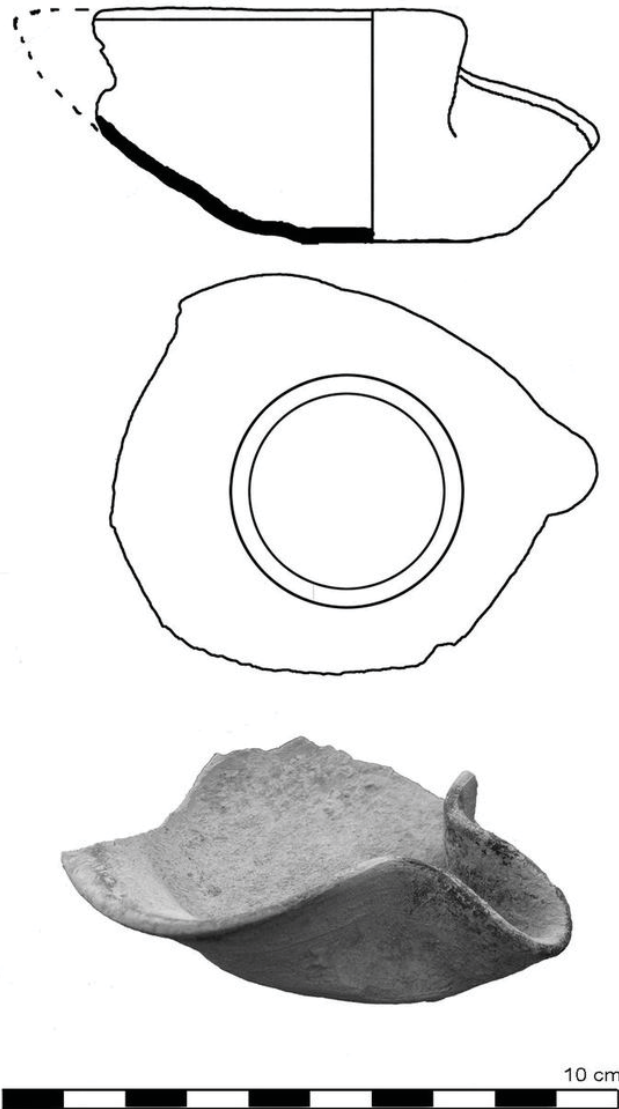


Figure 17. Iron IIB lamp found in the fill next to the Iron IIB storage jar in Square F3.

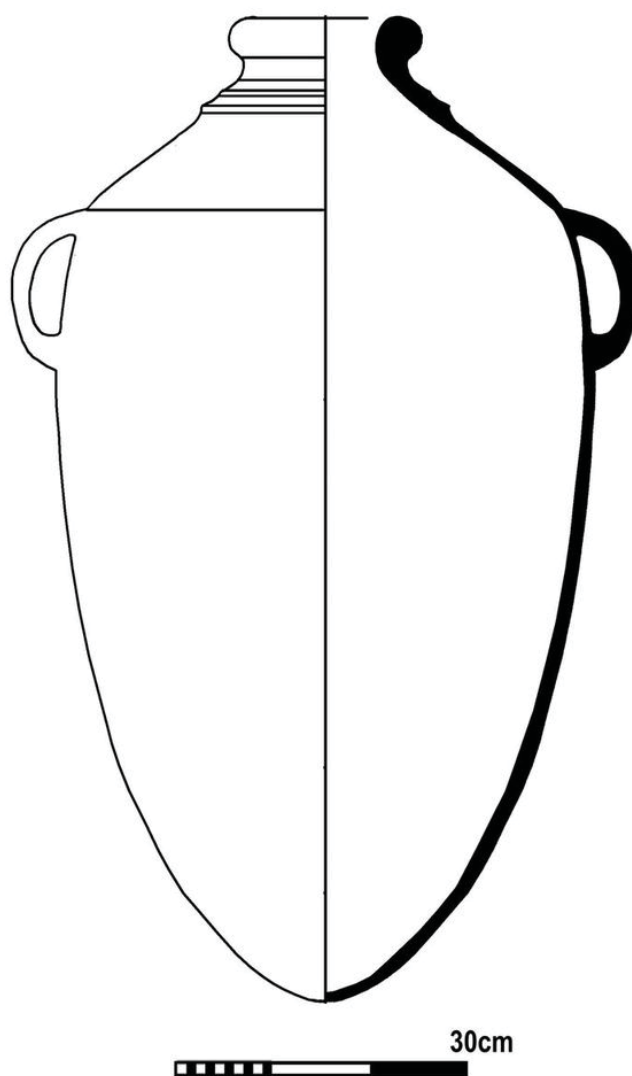


Figure 18. Diagram of Iron IIB storage jar found in Square F3. The jar was restored by ACOR and now resides in the Madaba Museum holdings.

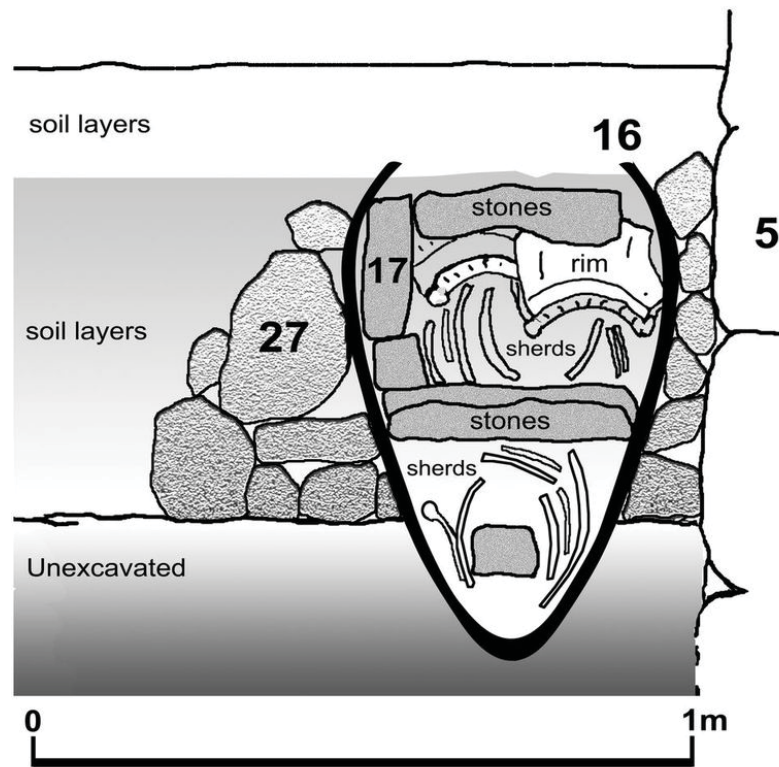


Figure 19. Diagram of the contents found in the Iron IIB storage jar and the installation stones supporting the jar. The rim and body sherds were found inside the jar.



Figure 20. Stone lining of the Iron IIB storage jar from Square F3.



Figure 21. Facing west. Final photo of Square F4 showing the north wall of Rooms A and B from Square F3 and Wall 14.



Figure 22. Abelardo Rivas entering the Iron Age cistern in 2012.



Figure 23. Chang-Ho Ji discovering the bull carved on the wall of the cistern in 2011.

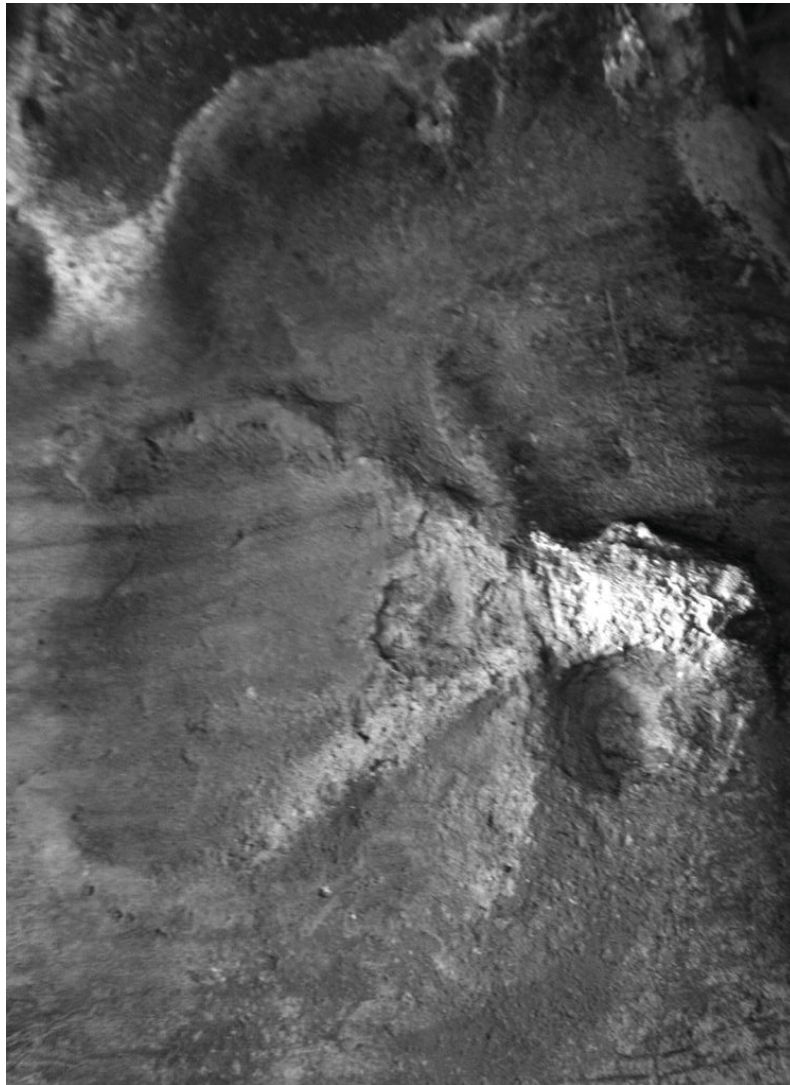


Figure 24. The bull carved and possibly plastered onto the wall of the cistern. Note the bull horns curve inward, and also the circular depressions between the horns and below the right ear.



Figure 25. Jerry Chase assisting the work to clear the inside of the cistern of debris.



Figure 26. Stefanie Elkins-Bates preparing the drawing of the bull in the cistern and other artifacts.

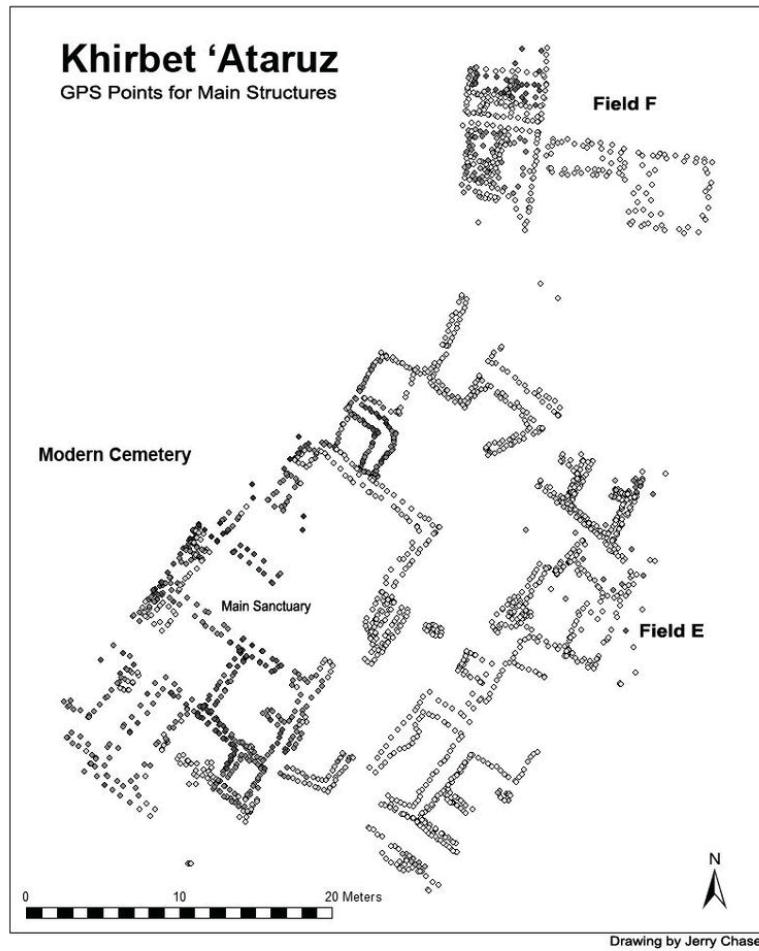


Figure 27. Map created from the GPS points taken in Jerry Chase's survey. The points, which show where the major walls stand, were used to adjust the architectural drawings. Note Fields E and F are indicated.



Figure 28. Robert Bates uses the Promark 3 GPS rover to survey walls on the western slope of the tell.



Figure 29. Facing south. Perimeter wall on the western slope of the tell.

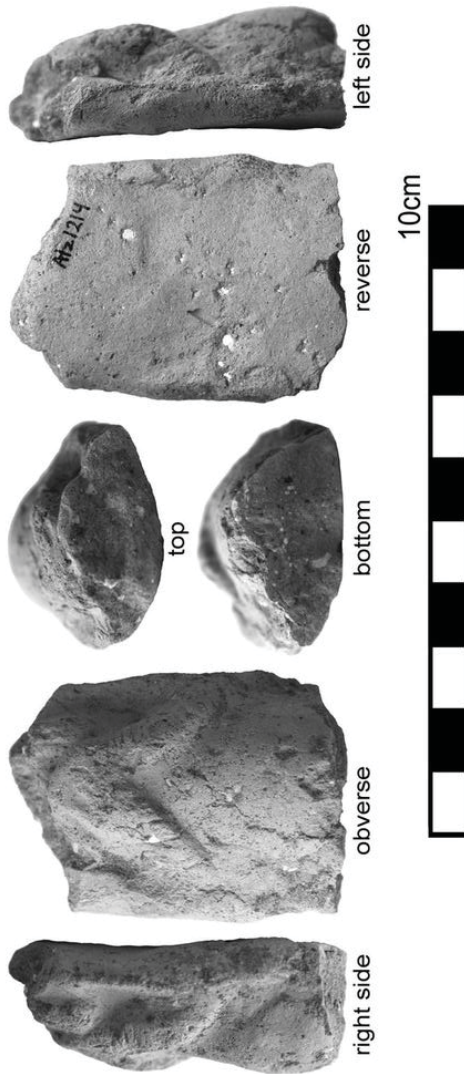


Figure 30. Small female votive figure with distended abdomen and two hands clutching a flat disk.